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ABSTRACT

Directors of forensics at research universities are subject to a conflict between attaining pedagogically justified goals for forensic activities and the realities incumbent upon the mission of a research university. The ideal, pedagogical view of forensics maintains that a forensics program should offer a broad range of activities, should be accessible to all interested undergraduate students, and should be viewed as humanistic education. However, institutional priorities often diminish the "ideal." As research universities increase their pressures upon all faculty for research productivity, the time allocated for forensics becomes increasingly unrealistic. So the first two ideals of a program, being multi-faceted and appealing to all interested undergraduate students, are likely to be eroded by the demand characteristics and evaluation procedures operating at graduate research universities. Additionally, the shift in the field of communication from a humanistic orientation to a social/behavioral science perspective tends to delegitimize the operation of a forensics program. While there should be a shift in the preparation of the next generation of forensics directors towards this social science perspective, there is some question whether the field of communication will be as accommodating of forensics programs in research universities. (Author/HOD)

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Philosophy and Reality at a Research University

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Philosophy and Reality at a Research University

Abstract

This paper contends that Directors of Forensics at Research Universities are subject to a conflict between attaining pedigogically justified goals for Forensic activities with the realities incumbent upon the mission of a research university. As research universities increase their pressures upon all faculty for research productivity, the time allocation allowed for forensics direction becomes increasingly unrealistic. In short, there is a gap between the time assigned for forensics and the actual demand required for its execution.

Additionally, the shift in the field of communication from a humanistic orientation to a social/behavioral science perspective tends to delegitimize the operation of a forensics program. While there should be a shift in the preparation of the next generation of forensics directors towards this social science perspective, it is questioned whether the field of communication will be as accomodating to forensics programs in research universities. If they should prove to be hostile to sponsoring forensics programs, then the education of the next generation of forensics directors may be restricted severely.

Philosophy and Reality at a Research University

When I first accepted the invitation of our panel chairperson to participate on this panel, I understood his intention was to focus our comments on two primary questions. The first was "What is your philosophy of Forensics?" The second inquired "How do the realities of your institution affect your philosophy.?"

In responding to these two charges I quickly realized that I would be afforded the opportunity to begin my memoirs and test the viability of such a venture on the popular market. Upon further reflection I concluded that such an effort would pale when compared with other Polish literary luminaries such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, Joseph Conrad, Czesław Miłosz, and Jerzy Kosinski.

My intent in this paper is to address the questions asked of us as they apply to a graduate/research-oriented institution. I have done this in two sections. In the first section I will maintain fidelity with the questions and explain my philosophy of forensics and how the realities of my institution affect this philosophy. I think it should be understood that these views are necessarily personal, if not idiosyncratic, and reflect a perspective developed over the two decades I have participated in, coached, or directed forensics.

Since I am self-conscious of representing my experience as typical of Forensics programs, I have devoted a second section to explore more broadly some of the persistent issues which confront forensics programs at the graduate/research level and the implications these present. Again, I don't presume this to be an exhaustive review, but rather a somewhat personal assessment of the consequences the field of forensics faces from choices made in graduate/research institutions.

The Ideal: A pedagogical view of Forensics

My entre to the coaching ranks corresponded closely with the occurrence of the first National Developmental Conference on Forensics. While not a participant of this conference, I found many of its recommendations foundational to my philosophy of forensics. I believe I can reference many of my beliefs in these recommendations. I have identified my philosophy in a series of propositions, each of which is followed by a short "justification." Since I could find reason to endorse most of the conference recommendations, I have limited myself to those which are most salient to my personal philosophy.

1. A Forensics Program should offer a broad range of activities. This position reflects recommendations #1, #7, and #13 of "Future Goals and Roles" of the 1st Argumentation Conference.[1] In short my position is that there is no single forensic activity which is optimal for all students. While debate may serve one type of student, it does not serve all. The same may be said of interpretation events or public speaking. Univocal programs certainly provide benefit to the students they serve. Their limitation, however, is that they tend to exclude students whose interest and aptitude are toward forensics events the program does not offer. My experience has been that few debaters will attempt poetry interpretation. The same may be said of the crossover from interpretation to debate. Exclusive focus programs, whether intercollegiate debate, individual events, parliamentary debate, or other, tacitly presume there is only "one way to know." I believe each activity serves valid educational goals though they may vary in their emphasis of skill development.

   A pre-emption or two is in order. Obviously, many programs are inadequately staffed or budgeted to accomplish the "broad-based" range of activities I propose. Individual forensic coaches/directors may not possess the

requisite training to develop a multi-faceted program. Few programs are faced with a perennial problem of how to expend a budget. Nevertheless, even in those programs with limited staff and budget, diverse forums for the exercise of a particular type of forensic activity may develop different skills and serve a wider array of students.

Graduate programs afford forensics a greater potential for developing a multi-faceted program. Porter's survey of Forensics suggests that many programs housed in graduate-degree departments have one or more graduate assistants working with the forensics program.[2] Under such circumstances, it should be somewhat easier to secure the assistance of coaches who possess expertise in areas not shared by the forensics director.

Hence, it is my contention that graduate-research departments should be better able to offer a wider range of forensic activities through securing assistants who possess coaching skills in diverse areas of forensics. If the director doesn't possess expertise in one or more forensic activities, graduate assistants in the program may.

2. Forensics participation should be accessible to all interested undergraduate students. This proposition is reflected in recommendation #1 of Future Roles and Goals" of the 1st Developmental Conference on Forensics.[3] The genesis of this goal for me reflects my observation that many college students do not have the benefit of previous high school experience. Often this occurs because forensic activities are not available in their high schools. While I cannot cite any systematic data to support this claim, I can offer annecdotal evidence and personal observation.

When I left Illinois in 1979, I was told that only somewhat more than ten percent of the high schools offered programs in debate.[4] My observation

identified the great majority of high school programs were located in the Chicago suburban school districts and larger metropolitan high schools located in downstate Illinois. Only a smattering of programs existed outside of these two enclaves. Except for some parochial and private high schools within the city of Chicago, interscholastic debate did not exist in the largest school district in the state. This observation has generally held true in Kansas and Oklahoma.

It is further my observation that many college programs, regardless of their emphasis--NDT debate, CEDA debate, Individual Events--do not make concerted efforts to involve inexperienced students in their programs. Since the majority of graduate-research institutions are state-supported entities, I believe they have an obligation to provide access to any interested student regardless of major or previous experience. Of course, all students may not excel, and a program is certainly justified in requiring effort commensurate with experience for its students to travel. Nevertheless, opportunity for participation should be a privilege accorded all interested students.

Again, the graduate-research institution may be better situated in providing these opportunities. Presumably, the presence of forensic assistants would enable a program to serve a greater number of students, including those without experience.

3. Forensics should be viewed as humanistic education. This proposition is lifted verbatim from recommendation #4 under "Future Goals and Roles."[5] For me this goal means that each student is approached as a unique individual with dignity and worth as a person. Further, each individual has the capacity for self-realization through reason and inquiry. Forensic activities, be they debate, public address, or the interpretation of literature, provide the vehicle through which a student learns a critical process of

inquiry resulting in development of self. I can think of no other activity offered at the undergraduate level which promotes these critical inquiry skills comparable to forensics.

I seriously question whether an orientation other than humanistic education would justify a forensics program. A social science orientation may view forensics as a laboratory for observation. It may even derive useful generalizations about the modifications in behavior forensics participation may effect. However, the focus of such a perspective moves instruction away from self-realization except as it may coincidentally accompany the discovery of social norms.

The humanistic education perspective endorsed by the first National Developmental Conference may be in conflict with the Social Science orientation which some believe characterize the majority of graduate-research departments in the field of communication.[6] I believe this to be the case. However, its discussion is more appropriate to the next part of this section.

The Real: Forensics Under Fire

How well have these ideals fared given the realities of the institution? Not as well as I would have hoped, although this is not entirely a result of the location of my program within a research university. When I came to the university in 1982, I had great expectations about the possibilities it presented. The forensics program had been under a succession of graduate directors for some time. Hence, the elevation of the director of forensics to a faculty tenure line represented a commitment by the department and university for increased support beyond its previous level. The understanding was for increased levels of support commensurate with program development and growth. In fact my arrival was accompanied by a doubling of the previous budget.

Unfortunately, economic circumstances in the state curtailed increased budget-

ary support. Admittedly, the program's support from administration may be considered significant in that the budget was not cut during a two-year period when revenues for the university budget were cut by 11%. Nevertheless, the absence of budgetary increases had impact on program direction and goals. Again, these consequences are not related to university mission, so I will largely ignore them except as the exaccerbate institutional demands on the position. I will again use a propositional format to identify how institutional priorities impact on the "ideal" of my program philosophy.

1. The paradox of promotion and tenure in Forensics: Are Forensics Directors ever evaluated for their assignment? One focus of the second National Developmental Conference on Forensics was to re-examine standards and criteria for evaluating Directors of Forensics.[7] Certainly issues of promotion and tenure impact across all colleges and universities, regardless of mission. However, the presumption would be that graduate research institutions are more likely than community colleges or liberal arts colleges to require a record of scholarship from its director of forensics. Assuming a traditional tripartite evaluation of scholarship, teaching and service, directors affiliated with graduate programs may expect a higher proportion of their evaluation will be based upon scholarship and research productivity.[8]

   How does this impact on the forensics director? Well, the good news is that what data exists does not indicate that forensics directors are treated any worse than the population of faculty in departments of communication. Porter's preliminary data indicates only about a third of directors who fail to receive tenure are rejected for reasons of insufficient publication. Other reasons included afilure to complete the Ph.D., ineffective teaching, or ineffective management.[9] While comparative data for tenure decisions does not exist between forensics directors and other departmental faculty, Emmert

cites data to indicate that on the whole, the relative importance of publication is not as great as many would believe. Among four year colleges it averaged fourth of nine criteria.[10] Admittedly, his categorization of 4-year institutions mixes doctoral degree granting programs with liberal arts colleges. Nevertheless, he further reports the odds of receiving tenure are better than 50-50.[11]

The bad news is that even if forensics directors fare as well as their colleagues in promotion and tenure decisions, they nevertheless may suffer relative to the colleagues on assigned load not equalling their actual load. Hence, to be evaluated comparably with their colleagues, forensics directors have to do more. This occurs because the amount of assigned load given to forensics, if it exists at all, is typically in the range of 1/4 to 1/3 of an appointment, while the actual load of the forensics assignment required by the activity is upwards of 2/3 to 3/4 assignment.[12]

The second Developmental Conference recommended that a distinction be made between the standards and criteria used to evaluate forensics educators. In short this recommendation was that while forensic educators should be "evaluated according to the same standards as other faculty," the criteria should be "at the same level of quality expected of other faculty."[13] I believe that evaluations are too frequently made on a quantitative comparison among departmental faculty, obscurring differences in assignment. This is usually to the detriment of the forensics educator.

The impact of this paradox faced by forensics coaches is that they have a unique assignment which cuts across all three of the traditional categories for promotion and tenure, yet their evaluation either categorizes their effort within a single category, or understates it by making quantitative comparisons of output without cognizance of assignment load. In either case the forensics educator often finds his/her relative evaluation diminished in com-

parison with department peers. The alternative is to do more to be treated the same. Neither case is equitable. While this demand characteristic is probably true regardless of university or departmental mission, it presumably is increased with the greater scholarship demands required of the research university.

It has long been known that the life expectancy of a forensics educator is not long. An early survey by Klopf and Rives revealed that 58% of college coaches have served for 1-5 years while only 20% coached longer than ten years.[14] More recent data from Anderson and Matlon show high school coaches only yield 12% who serve more than 10 years.[15] Most recently, Porter's survey yielded a response of almost half of the college respondents of their intent to leave active coaching.[16] While noteworthy exceptions exist, these data all point in the direction of suggesting that the load demand characteristics of the forensics educator ultimately leads most of them to resign from the activity after a relatively short period of time. This pressure is magnified as the pressures for scholarship increase.

I think the consequence is predictable. Something has to give, and the path of least resistance is usually to restrict the size and scope of the forensics program. Even if department tenure committees are willing to accommodate the demand characteristics of the forensics director, subsequent levels of evaluation in the university hierarchy tend to be less accommodating. While not addressing forensics directors specifically, Jack Matthews describes the scenario of ad hoc tenure committees being reluctant to recommend tenure for outstanding teachers whose research is marginal.[17]

So the forensics director either consciously or tacitly makes fewer efforts to recruit inexperienced students, because they require a greater investment of time. Similarly, diverse program offerings are also likely to be sacrificed because they also require the expenditure of scarce time. So

the first two ideals of a program, being multi-faceted and appealing to all interested undergraduate students, are likely to be eroded by the demand characteristics and evaluation procedures operating at graduate research universities.

2. Can a Social Science orientation accomodate a Humanistic activity? I find it interesting that the Town Hall presentation scheduled for this conference focuses on the same issue I highlight here. While I cannot know what parallels will exist between my argument and those speaking in favor of the proposition, I think this larger debate is pertinent to the issue here.[18]

Programs in forensics evolved with the development of the field as it separated itself from departments of English. The very term "forensics" reflects a classical categorization of discourse. What happens when the "roots" of the activity are supplanted by an orientation which is increasingly social/behavioral scientific? There are really two alternatives in my estimation: Either forensics programs become adaptive to the emerging conceptualization of the field or they whither away. Let me investigate these two prospects.

I think it can be safely asserted that the "lead" for evolution in the field of communication comes primarily from the graduate departments. While not all graduate programs have adopted a view of the field as a "social science," a great many have moved in that direction. It is my assessment that this is partially a motivation for efforts to redefine the name of this association to drop "Speech" from "Communication" as the identifying label. What's in a name? In part, a name reflects an identity. And the movement to change the name is to treat the rhetorical/humanistic element of the field as a diminished artifact; an historic footnote in an evolutionary process. The diminution of a humanistic orientation bodes ill for forensics, and to

to the extent it is likely to occur at graduate research universities first, it carris some potentially devastating consequences for forensics.

The first implication is that fewer graduate programs remain which will teach the next generation of forensics educators. One opinion offered that there are only seven doctoral granting programs now which currently support forensics programs.[19] Several graduate programs in the field have demoted the position of director of forensics to a graduate-directed or non-tenure position.[20]

While it is certainly possible to provide a forensics program without a tenure-eligible faculty member, I think the reduced status reflects in the changes we observe in the activity. Aside from the likelihood that a tenure ineligible director will have diminished status relative to his/her departmental colleagues, there is a probable reduction in the pedagogical orientation a program will display in the development of its students.

Understand, this is not an indictment of the motives or efforts of those who direct a program in a non-tenure eligible role. Rather, the predictable turnover of director disrupts program continuity at the very least. At the very worst, the short-term director may raise the performance expectations for the students so they will reflect favorably on him/her in seeking the next job. Education may well become incidental rather than focal under either of these circumstances.

Can a social-science orientation absorb the traditionally humanistic activity? There are really two questions imbedded here. One is whether the next generation of forensics directors will prepare themselves as social scientists. The other question is whether social science departments will accept them. I think the answer to the former question is yes; graduate students preparing themselves in the field who have forensics interests will reflect changes in the field, although there may be some lag involved.

The answer to the latter question is more perplexing. What is the purpose of allocating a faculty line to an activity which is, by its nature, primarily an undergraduate activity? Granted, the forensics student may be studied in the context of the event in which he/she participates. Such an approach under the Social Sciences might be conveniently labeled the as the "Forensics Laboratory." It would essentially treat the forensics student as involved in a type of learning environment which may be studied, and the results of which may be applied to pedagogy outside of forensics.

Such an approach would generate empirical research which might make the forensics director more identifiable within the ideology of the department. In a superficial way it may grant the activity legitimacy. But only in a superficial way. An humanistic endeavor, categorized, measured, and quantified in a scientific manner, nonetheless, remains an humanistic endeavor. Those who wish to view forensics as a secondary or minor concern of the discipline will not likely diminish their antipathy. If research of the effects of forensics training are viewed now as having limited scope and application, then whether it is conducted by more social scientifically minded directors of forensics will be irrelevant.

The Surreal: The Future Prospects and Implications

The picture I have painted implies that forensics educators at the university level will be hard-pressed to meet both the requirements of directing a program while meeting their department/university expectations for increasing scholarly productivity for promotion and tenure. How can directors at research universities meet these expectations? The recently concluded second National Developmental Conference on Forensics offers some recommendations which need to be implemented to address the imbalance between expectations and support.

First, as the recommendations of the Conference pertinent to promotion and tenure need to be disseminated to appropriate departmental and institutional

administration. The conference recommended that forensic directors be afforded adequate staff, support, and assignment of load to meet program responsibilities.[21] In the context of the report, it was noted that while standards applied to a forensics educator be those faced for all departmental faculty, the criteria of their application be reflective of the forensic educators unique assignment.[22] In the all important area of scholarly productivity, the forensics educator should be expected to produce scholarship which is equal in quality to colleagues, but which may be altered in quantity to satisfy assignment responsibilities.

The vehicle for this adjustment was also included in the recommendations when the conference voted to secure the endorsement of the Association for Communication Administration, Speech Communication Association, and the professional and honorary forensics associations.[23] To date, little has occurred as follow-up to these recommendations.

A second obvious implication is that Directors of Forensics at Research Universities should be apprised of their responsibility to more fully participate in scholarship. Bemoaning their plight will not change its reality. The constriction of the student population base following the baby boom will mean that competition will remain kean for the foreseeable future in all of academia. This should be no less true in forensic positions, especially at major research universities.

As for the pre-eminence of the social scientific view of the field which appears to characterize the field today, such evolution is cyclical. Nothing is so permanent as to defy reformation. If there has been a failure in the forensics community, it has been its failure to educate the field of communication of its own growth and evolution. Certainly, forensics educators should be among those most capable of launching a persuasive campaign of its viability and necessity within the field in particular, and the curriculum in general.

Endnotes

[1]"Future Goals and Roles" in Forensics as Communication, J. McBath (ed.). Skokie, IL: National Textbook, 1975, 12-21.

[2]Sharon Porter, "Preliminary Analysis on Promotion and Tenure Survey," Unpublished. The results cited here are from the preliminary data analysis of a return by 127 Directors of Forensics and 94 Chairpersons. These data are used with the permission of Sharon Porter.

[3]Forensics as Communication, 12

[4]This statement comes from Robert Neulieb, University High School, Normal, Illinois. It is based on IHSA data.

[5]Forensics as Communication, 14.

[6]For instance, the "Town Hall" debate for this conference is predicated upon the statement "Departments of speech communication are now dominated by the behavioral or social science perspective. . ." See "Seventy-First Annual Meeting Speech Communication Association," program, p. 23.

[7]Craig A. Dudczak and David Zarefsky, "Promotion and Tenure Standards," in American Forensics in Perspective, D. Parson (ed.). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1984, 23-35.

[8]"Preliminary Analysis on Promotion and Tenure Survey," Porter.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Philip Emmert, "Salary, Merit, Promotion and Tenure Practices in Speech Communication Departments," ACA Bulletin 36 (April 1981), 73.

[11]Ibid., 72-74.

[12]Steve Hunt, "Fifty Great Forensics Programs, unpublished, August 1983, 5.

[13]"Promotion and Tenure Standards," 28.

[14]Donald Klopf and Stanley Rives, "Characteristics of High School and College Forensics Directors," Journal of the American Forensic Association 2 (January 1965), 34-35.

[15]Betty Anderson and Irene Matlon, "A Description of High School Forensics Program Report on a National Survey," Journal of the American Forensics Association, 10 (Winter 1974), 124.

[16]"Preliminary Analysis on Promotion and Tenure Survey," Porter.

[17]Jack Matthews, "Getting Some In and Some Out," ACA Bulletin 42 (October 1982), 19-20.

[18]SCA "Town Hall" debate, program, 23.

[19]"Preliminary Analysis on Promotion and Tenure Survey," Porter.

[20]"Preliminary Analysis on Promotion and Tenure Survey," Porter

[21]"Promotion and Tenure Standards," 30.

[22]Ibid., 28.

[23]Ibid., 31